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ABSTRACT

During the spring of 1998, Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) surveyed 17 employers of its 1996-97 graduates to evaluate the occupational success of its students and the effectiveness of the college's academic programs in preparing graduates for work in various professions. Results include: (1) more than 80% of employers rated the graduates as either "excellent" or "good" in every job performance category (technical job skills, quality of work, quantity of work, attitude toward work, cooperation with fellow workers, and cooperation with supervisors); (2) in comparison with previous classes, the 1996-97 graduates were above the 5-year average in every job performance category--not only were the ratings higher than the average in three categories, they were higher than any graduating class has received during the past 5 years; (3) in the general skills categories of math, speaking, and logic, more than 80% of employers rated the graduates as either "excellent" or "good"; (4) more than 70% of the employers rated the graduates' writing and research skills "excellent" or "good"; (5) occupational education and training at PVCC was rated as "excellent" or "good" by all of the participating employees, as was general education. Appended are: Employer Comments, Job Titles of PVCC Graduates, Participating Employers list, and the survey instrument. (EMH)

*Employer Survey
Results for the
PVCC Graduating
Class of 1996-97*

*Research Report No. 4-2001
June 2001*

*Piedmont Virginia
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Charlottesville, Virginia*



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PVCC Graduating Class of 1996-97**

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Introduction

This report is the 13th in a series of annual studies on employer satisfaction with Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) graduates.¹ For many students, the primary purposes of a college education are to obtain a particular job and to attain success in that job. Many academic programs are designed to secure jobs for students in technical fields or to upgrade occupational skills. Graduate follow-up surveys, skill tests, and a number of other tools are available for measurement purposes, but ultimately an employer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction determines occupational success for both the graduate and the academic program. At a time when state legislatures, accrediting agencies, and state coordinating boards are demanding student outcome assessment, employer evaluations are extremely important for all institutions of higher education.

Methodology

To protect the privacy rights of graduates, surveys were mailed only to employers of graduates who had given permission on a graduate follow-up survey to conduct an employer survey. Although this limits the number of employers who can be contacted, as well as raises the possibility of a self-selection bias, the privacy rights of PVCC must be ensured.

¹ Employer surveys have been conducted on an annual basis since 1987 (see Ronald B. Head, *Employer Survey Results for the PVCC Graduating Class of 1984-1985*, PVCC Research Report No. 5-87, June 1987). The most recent survey was published in 2001 (see William H. Payne Jr. and Jennifer A. Shields, *Employer Survey Results for the PVCC Graduating Class of 1995-96*, PVCC Research Report No. 3-01, June 2001).

On the graduate follow-up survey for the class of 1996-97, 30 graduates, or 34.8% of all respondents, answered yes to the question, "May we contact your employer to conduct an employer follow-up survey?" This figure is lower than previous years (50% of the 1995-96 class, 41.4% of the 1994-95 class and 52.2% of the 1993-94 class agreed).

During the spring of 1998, the Office of Institutional Research mailed surveys to 30 employers of 1996-97 PVCC graduates. Seventeen employers completed and returned valid surveys for a response rate of 56.7%. This response rate was considerably lower than the response rate from the surveys done in previous years: 1995-96 (66.7%), 1994-95 (62.9%), 1993-94 (72.9%) and 1992-93 (80.5%).

In prior studies, the possibility of self-selection bias was addressed by calculating correlation coefficients between each of the job performance categories contained in Table 1 and the job satisfaction of PVCC graduates². These studies found no statistically significant correlation between job satisfaction and employer evaluations.

As noted earlier, surveying employers only with prior permission from PVCC graduates may have biased the survey results. One might assume that satisfied, productive workers are more likely than unsatisfied, unproductive workers to allow their employers to be contacted. The possibility that results of the survey were biased by the selection procedure is a valid concern.

² See Khan M. Hassan and William H. Payne Jr., *Employer Survey Results for the PVCC Graduating Class of 1994-95*, PVCC Research Report No. 6-97, December 1997.

Indeed 1996-97 graduate survey data suggests that graduates who granted PVCC permission to contact their employers had higher levels of job satisfaction than did survey respondents in general. In general, graduates whose employers were surveyed reported they would pursue their current jobs as long-range careers more than other graduate survey respondents. Of the 17 graduates whose employers returned valid surveys, 70.6% indicated on the graduate follow-up survey that they intended to pursue their current jobs as long-range careers. On the other hand, only 39.5% of all employed graduate survey respondents indicated that they planned to pursue their current positions long-term.

Graduates who participated in the employer survey also were more likely than other 1996-97 PVCC graduates to be satisfied with their present jobs. Over eighty percent of graduates (82.4%) whose employers participated in the employer survey indicated on the graduate follow-up survey that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with their jobs. In contrast, only 65.1% of all employed graduate survey respondents indicated that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with their jobs.

Employer comments are included in this study as Appendix A. A list of the job titles of PVCC graduates whose employers completed surveys is included as Appendix B, and a list of all participating employers as Appendix C. The survey instrument is included as Appendix D.

Evaluation of Job Performance

Overall, employers were very pleased with the job skills, work performance, and attitudes of the 1996-97 PVCC graduates they hired. As can be seen in Table 1, in all categories but one, over 90% PVCC graduates were rated as either "Excellent" (one of the best ever) or "Good" (better than most) in every job performance category. The category with a slightly lower rating was Quantity of Work. This category, however, was still very high, with over 80% of graduates' employers rating them as either "Excellent" or "Good."

Table 1: Evaluation of Job Performance

Category	Excellent		Good		Average		Poor	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Technical Job Skills	10	58.8%	7	41.2%	0	0%	0	0%
Quality of Work	13	76.5%	3	17.6%	1	5.9%	0	0%
Quantity of Work	13	76.5%	1	5.9%	3	17.6%	0	0%
Attitude Toward Work	13	76.5%	3	17.6%	1	5.9%	0	0%
Cooperation with Fellow Workers	12	70.6%	4	23.5%	1	5.9%	0	0%
Cooperation with Supervisors	15	88.2%	2	11.8%	0	0%	0	0%

To place these figures in perspective, this study compares composite employer ratings for the 1996-97 graduates with an average of ratings from the previous five graduating classes. Composite ratings indicate the proportion of employers who rated the PVCC graduates as either "Excellent" or "Good" in a given job-performance or general skill category. By comparing the composite ratings of recent graduates with those of their predecessors, researchers are able to determine whether the evaluations of the 1996-97 PVCC graduates are

above, below, or consistent with the average. Care should be taken in interpreting these figures, however, due to the small number of 1996-97 employer survey respondents.

Comparative ratings indicate that the employers were exceptionally pleased with the 1996-97 graduates. Ratings of the 1996-96 graduates were higher than the 5-year average in every category. As can be seen in Table 2, employers rated 1996-97 graduates well above the average in Technical Job Skills (+21.1%) and Quality of Work (+11.7%). In the rest of the categories, the graduates were also rated above average: Quantity of Work (+4.8%), Attitude Toward Work (+8.7%), Cooperation With Peers (+8.3%), and Cooperation With Supervisors (+8.4%).

Table 2: Job Performance Rating Comparison

Category	1996-97 Ratings	5-Year Average	Difference
Technical Job Skills	100%	78.9%	21.1%
Quality of Work	94.2%	82.5%	11.7%
Quantity of Work	82.4%	77.6%	4.8%
Attitude Toward Work	94.2%	85.4%	8.7%
Cooperation with Fellow Workers	94.2%	85.8%	8.3%
Cooperation with Supervisors	100%	91.6%	8.4%

Evaluation of General Skills

In addition to job performance, employers were asked to evaluate the general skills of the PVCC graduates they employ. General skills included math, writing, speaking, research and logic.

Overall, employers felt that 1996-97 graduates demonstrated better general skills than most of their other employees. As shown in Table 3, in all categories except Research Skills, more than three-fourths of employers surveyed rated 1996-97 PVCC graduates as either "Excellent" or "Good." In both the Math Skills and Speaking Skills categories, no employers rated graduates as either "Average" or "Poor." Graduates were rated lower in the Writing Skills category, with 76.5% being rated "Excellent" or "Good," and 11.8% being rated "Average." Research Skills were also rated lower than the rest of the categories, with 70.6% being rated "Excellent" or "Good," and 23.5% being rated "Average."

Table 3: Evaluation of General Skills

Category	Excellent		Good		Average		Poor	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Math Skills	10	58.8%	6	35.3%	0	0%	0	0%
Writing Skills	9	52.9%	4	23.5%	2	11.8%	0	0%
Speaking Skills	9	52.9%	6	35.3%	0	0%	0	0%
Research Skills	9	52.9%	3	17.6%	4	23.5%	0	0%
Logic Skills	10	58.8%	5	29.4%	2	11.8%	0	0%

Employers of 1996-97 PVCC graduates were more pleased than their predecessors with the skills of their employees. As can be seen in Table 4, composite employer ratings of the 1996-97 PVCC graduates were well above average in all categories, particularly Math Skills (+17.7%) and Logic Skills (+17.1%). As noted earlier, care should be exercised in interpreting these results due to the small number of returned employer surveys.

Table 4: General Skills Rating Comparison

Category	1996-97 Ratings	5-Year Average	Difference
Math Skills	94.1%	76.4%	17.7%
Writing Skills	76.5%	66.8%	9.6%
Speaking Skills	88.2%	71.8%	16.5%
Research Skills	70.6%	64.2%	6.4%
Logic Skills	88.2%	71.1%	17.1%

Evaluation of PVCC Education and Training

In addition to asking employers to evaluate job performance and general skills of PVCC graduates, employers rated the college itself in terms of Occupational Education and Training, and General Education. Employers were asked to compare PVCC to "similar colleges whose graduates you hire." All responding employers reported that PVCC is better than its competitors in both Occupational Education and Training and in General Education. As can be seen in Table 5, Occupational Training and Education was rated as either "Excellent" or "Good" by 88.2% of employers.

Table 5: Evaluation of PVCC Education

Category	Excellent		Good		Average		Poor	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Occupational Training & Education	8	47.1%	7	41.2%	0	0%	0	0%
General Education	9	52.9%	6	35.3%	0	0%	0	0%

Compared to previous years, 1996-97 graduates were again rated higher than graduates of previous years. As can be seen in Table 6, the 1996-97 ratings were above average in both categories.

Table 6: PVCC Education Rating Comparison

Category	1996-97 Ratings	5-Year Average	Difference
Occupational Education & Training	88.2%	82.6%	5.6%
General Skills	88.2%	79.2%	9.1%

Conclusions

The primary purpose of surveying employers is to determine employer satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, with the skills, performance and academic performance of PVCC graduates. Such surveys are important because they enable college officials to gauge the success of academic programs. Overall, employers were extremely satisfied with the job performance and skills of the 1996-97 PVCC graduates they hired, as well as with the training and education provided by PVCC.

Employers gave the job performance of PVCC graduates high ratings, with over 90% of the employers rating PVCC graduates as either "Excellent" or "Good" in every category but one (Quantity of Work). The job skills of 1996-97 graduates were also highly regarded by employers, with all but one category (Research Skills) receiving "Excellent" or "Good" ratings from more than 75% of employers. Finally, PVCC received praise from employers in the areas of Occupational Education and Training, and General Education, with all employers rating PVCC as either "Excellent" or "Good."

While PVCC graduates have a history of receiving high ratings from their employers, this class was exceptional. An increase from last year in "Excellent" and "Good" responses occurred across all categories. In addition, the class of 1996-97 received the highest percent of "Excellent" and "Good" ratings during the 5-year period in the categories of Technical Job Skills (100%), Quality of Work (94.1%), Cooperation with Peers (94.1%), Math Skills (94.1%), Writing Skills (76.5%), Speaking Skills (88.2%), and Logic Skills (88.2%).

Appendix A: Employer Comments

"I do the hiring for the store. I usually choose students from PVCC over UVA because of a better work ethic and loyalty. I'm not sure that PVCC teaches work ethics, but it enhances it with improved communication skills."

"A follow-up questionnaire to graduates/employers every 3 years; would need to add questions about why changed jobs, why not working, etc."

"The PVCC Nursing program in particular graduates mature, often second career adults with many life experiences. This is a big benefit to the Nursing Profession. Thanks."

"[PVCC Graduate] is a very special person, but the graduates we have employed from Piedmont have met our expectations. I think Piedmont is a very good school and prepares students well. It would be nice if the nursing students could carry an assignment of at least four patients before they graduate. I realize this is asking an awful lot but it would benefit the students."

Appendix B: Job Titles of PVCC Graduates

Associate Plant Engineer
Assistant Care Plan Coordinator
Business Manager
Charge Nurse
Clinician I RN
Customer Service Representative
Medical Laboratory Technician
Outreach Coordinator
Production Technician A
Project Assistant
Public Health Nurse
Registered Nurse
Senior Inspector
Senior Patrolman

Appendix C: Participating Employers

Albemarle County Police Department

Comdial

Eldercare Gardens

Litton Marine Systems (Sperry)

Madison House

Martha Jefferson Hospital

PRA

The Great Frame Up

The Mattie Corporation

The Village Nursing Center

UVA Primary Care

UVA, HSC

Virginia Business Interiors

WCBR

Appendix D: Survey Instrument

Piedmont Virginia Community College

Employer Survey for the Graduating Class of 1996-97

Instructions: Please check the appropriate box for each question. This information will be treated as strictly confidential with answers being combined for group analysis.

1. Compared to other employees you hire in a similar capacity, how does [PVCC Graduate] rate on each of the following job performance and general skill measures?

	"Excellent"	"Good"	"Average"	"Poor"	N/A
Technical job skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quality of work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quantity of work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attitude toward work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cooperation with fellow workers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cooperation with supervisors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Math skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Speaking skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Research skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

